****Avery D. Niles, Commissioner** **Department of Juvenile Justice**

Office of Communications 3408 Covington Highway ▪ Decatur, Georgia ▪ 30032-1513

 Telephone: (404) 508-7147 ▪ Fax: (404) 508-7341

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 **(404) 508-5119**

 **publicaffairs@djj.state.ga.us**

**Georgia Juvenile Offenders Celebrate Academic Achievement**

**Decatur, GA –** The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) held its annual winter high school commencement ceremony for youth attending the Georgia Preparatory Academy on December 14th at the Atlanta Youth Detention Center, in Atlanta, Georgia. DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles presented 19 High School Diplomas, 44 General Equivalency Degrees (GED) and 36 Technical Certificates of Credit to qualifying students.

“Our mission is to turn around the lives of these young people and give them the tools they need to succeed," said Commissioner Niles. "Life is about the choices you make, and these youths have chosen academics to start opening the doors to a brighter future."

The Department of Juvenile Justice is the 181st school district in Georgia. Within the school system, there is a middle and high school called Georgia Preparatory Academy and a GED program called Pathway to Success. Georgia Preparatory Academy and Pathway to Success are located at 29 campuses within Regional Youth Detention Centers, Youth Development Campuses, and Education Transition Centers across Georgia.

DJJ operates the Georgia Preparatory Academy with a curriculum that meets the education standards set forth by the Georgia Department of Education for all public schools. Since Commissioner Niles’ appointment in 2012, 146 High School Diplomas, 420 GED Diplomas and 140 Technical Certificates of Credit have been issued to students under his care.

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“Graduation is always such an uplifting experience,” said Dr. Jean Lee, Associate Superintendent of DJJ Schools. Our youth have overcome incredible odds, and to see them walk across the stage having earned their high school diploma or GED fills us with a sense of pride in their accomplishments.

Following graduation, each student who remains in a DJJ secure facility is enrolled in the Connections Graduate Program (CGP) which is designed to prepare the youth for college or a career. CGP instructors specialize in educational and employability development.

Students participating in last weeks commencement ceremonies are currently in custody at DJJ secure facilities in Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, Eastman, Gainesville, Macon, Milledgeville, Rockdale, Sumter, Terrell, and Waycross.

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